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TAGS: SREF, VN, TH
SUBJECT: ECONOMIST ARTICLE ON PUSHOFFS/CONGRESSIONAL
HEARINGS

1. JANUARY 28TH ISSUE OF THE ECONOMIST CARRIES AN ARTICLE, "THE FRIENDLESS SHORE", ON THE RECENT PUSHOFF INCIDENTS. ARTICLE WAS FIRST BROUGHT TO DEPARTMENT'S ATTENTION BY STAFF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE'S EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC SUBCOMMITTEE, WHO ARE PREPARING QUESTIONS FOR HEARINGS WHICH WILL DEAL WITH FY '85 SECURITY ASSISTANCE, ETC. THE HEARINGS ARE SET TO BEGIN MONDAY AFTERNOON, FEBRUARY 6TH. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD TO EXPECT QUESTIONS ON INVOLVEMENT OF RTG UNITS IN THE PUSHOFFS AND ON THE EFFICACY OF THE UNHCR/THAI ANTI-PIRACY PROGRAM.

2. BEGIN QUOTE: ANY REFUGEE BOAT FROM VIETNAM IS OFFICIALLY ASSURED OF A SAFE HAVEN IN THAILAND. BUT THE AUTHORITIES IN THE THAI PORT OF NARATHIWAT CHOSE TO FORGET THIS. ON JANUARY 11TH TWO BOATS THAT HAD RECENTLY ARRIVED FROM VIETNAM WITH 72 PEOPLE ABOARD WERE MOVED ON. ONE REACHED MALAYSIA SAFELY. THE OTHER SANK. IT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN RAMMED BY THE THAI FISHING BOAT THAT WAS TOWING IT OUT OF PORT; 23 REFUGEES WERE LEFT TO DROWN. EYEWITNESSES TESTIFY THAT THE OPERATION WAS DIRECTED BY A THAI OFFICIAL IN UNIFORM.

THE THAIS ARE PAID TO BE THE SCOURGE OF THE PIRATES (THEMSELVES MOSTLY THAI) WHO PREY ON REFUGEE BOATS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA. BUT IN THE 18 MONTHS SINCE THE UNITED NATIONS STARTED SUPPLYING THE THAI GOVERNMENT WITH PATROL BOATS, TRAWLERS, SPOTTER AIRCRAFT AND DECOY BOATS FOR TRACKING AND TRAPPING PIRATES, NOT A SINGLE PIRATE HAS BEEN CONVICTED. IN DECEMBER SIX WOMEN WERE RAPED BY PIRATES AFTER BEING PUSHED BACK TO SEA BY THE THAIS. MORE THAN HALF THE 416 REFUGEE BOATS THAT ARRIVED IN THAILAND AND MALAYSIA LAST YEAR HAD BEEN ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE; 69 REFUGEES WERE KILLED, 173 WERE RAPED, AND 159, MOSTLY YOUNG WOMEN, ABDUCTED.

FRUSTRATED UN OFFICIALS ARE WONDERING WHETHER THE 2.6M DOLS ANTI-PIRACY PROGRAMME IS WORTH CONTINUING. SOME DONOR COUNTRIES ARE WONDERING LIKEWISE. BUT THE

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BIGGEST BACKER OF ALL, THE UNITED STATES, HAS ALREADY PROMISED ANOTHER 5M DOLS FOR CHASING PIRATES NEXT YEAR, ON THE REASONING THAT SOMETHING IS BETTER THAN NOTHING. JUST.

MOST REFUGEES NOW LEAVE VIETNAM BY AIR UNDER THE "ORDERLY DEPARTURES" SCHEME SANCTIONED BY THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT. A JUMBO JET FULL OF REFUGEES TAKES OFF FOR THE WEST EVERY THURSDAY. IN DECEMBER THE NUMBER OF BOAT PEOPLE WHO LANDED IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA WAS THE SMALLEST FOR SEVEN YEARS. BUT THAT STILL MAKES 970 VIETNAMESE DESPERATE ENOUGH TO BRAVE PIRATE-INFESTED SEAS AND FRIENDLESS SHORES. END QUOTE.

3. AT CHAIRMAN SOLARZ' REQUEST, INR HAS AGREED TO PREPARE A REPORT ON THE PUSHOFF INCIDENTS WHICH WILL BE GIVEN TO HIM ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3RD. EMBASSY'S FURTHER REPORTING, PARTICULARLY ON ANY ADDITIONAL RTG RESPONSES, WOULD BE WELCOME.

4. THAI EMBASSY HERE HAS SOUNDED US OUT ON OUR REQUESTING A DELAY IN THE SUBCOMMITTEE'S TAKING UP CONSIDERATION OF THE PUSHOFF INCIDENTS UNTIL AFTER THE RTG HAS COMPLETED ITS INVESTIGATIONS. WE EXPECT SUBCOMMITTEE WOULD NOT BE RECEPTIVE TO THIS SUGGESTION UNLESS RESULTS OF RTG INVESTIGATION WERE IMMINENT. HAS EMBASSY ANY REASON TO BELIEVE RTG WILL MOVE INVESTIGATION ALONG QUICKLY TO A CONCLUSION? WE WILL MAKE SURE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE US WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE INR REPORT. DAM
END OF MESSAGE

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